

Editor's Introduction: Teaching for Success

The current conservative political climate is having a devastating effect on those involved in the education of our children. Much of the political language focusing on schools and education today is a language of failure rather than a language of success. Educational accountability for teachers, schools, and students appears directed toward identifying those not achieving under highly prescriptive standards as failures and prompts an even more strong handed, top-down decision-making process that tends to further exacerbate the problem. Federal and state funds are withheld, teachers and administrators reel with stress, and families and children are caught in a wave of uncertainty. What we are witnessing in today's educational climate is far from hopeful, primarily because of the ways in which legislated mandates are used to measure, prescribe, reward, and punish those educators working with our nation's youth. Just today a news report described the suicide of a school principal in Atlanta as being related to her school coming up one-tenth of a point short on a series of standardized tests measuring school achievement. Her school was identified as failing and subject to drastic measures including busing students to distant schools and dismantling the faculty. Teachers and administrators are currently under siege and the stress associated with possible failure looms tragic. The assumption is that more testing will result in more learning. Of course, the question must be asked, what kind of learning? What are students learning as a result of so much time taking tests? And, is this the kind of learning experience we want our children to have?

According to William Glasser, M.D., the world is driven by external control psychology, which is expressed in the notion that, "I know what's right for you, and I'm going to change you." This external control psychology, I would suggest, has become invasively prevalent and negatively affects the lives and educational

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opportunities of millions of students in schools across the country. Controlling forces from above dictate what should take place in classrooms, what teachers should teach, how they should teach it, and what students ought to know in order to be deemed successful. This heavy-handed, top-down, controlling approach to schooling is in direct contrast with the very experience of becoming an educated person. Education is and should be liberating. Education is about inquiry, discovery, exploration, wonder, imagination, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and adventure. What we see today are school systems based on coercion and obedience, mistrust and punishment. The organizational management of schools has become increasingly centralized and intent on furthering an agenda that has more to do with standardization than with a liberal education.

What does one make of a society that places such newsworthy emphasis on identifying schools, administrators, teachers, students, and even parents, as failures? It is sad to think that productive and useful human energy is being spent in undermining educational opportunities for our children. Explicit efforts to design high-stakes testing regimens to seek out failing schools are counterproductive to the goals of a liberal and public education. It is our responsibility as educators to help each and every one of our students become successful, and in having them discover themselves as productive, contributing citizens living and working in a democratic society. And yet, with the great disparity among those who have and those who do not, the inequities plaguing student access to a good education, and the multitude of variables associated with academic success, those in power continue to perceive teaching and learning as mechanical, technical, surely not intellectual, and of course, easily measured. This perception is both shallow and destructive, and fails to recognize teaching and learning as highly complex intellectual activities. The assessment of student learning and the expectations held for teacher candidates are much too complex to be understood within the context of standardization and the high stakes testing that accompanies such political heavy handedness.

The articles appearing in this Summer 2002 issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* represent scholarship on a variety of efforts aimed toward improving the quality of teacher education and professional development. The work embedded in this issue speaks clearly to the need for understanding the complexities inherent in providing high quality educational opportunities for both teachers and students. Dana L. Grisham, Marlowe Berg, Victoria R. Jacobs, and Carla Mathison present in "Can a Professional Development School Have a Lasting Impact on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices?" the findings of their research study on a professional development school that has been in existence for over 15 years.

Hillary S. Hertzog follows with "When, How, and Who Do I Ask for Help? Novices Perceptions of Problems and Assistance," a study of alternative-permit first-year teachers and the problems they face in learning to teach in urban classrooms.

In “Tensions in Assessment Design: Professional Development under High-Stakes Accountability,” Andrea Whittaker and Viki M. Young explore the disconnectedness between the value of state-mandated high stakes testing and classroom-based teacher assessment of student work.

Furthering the debate on high stakes testing, Sheryl O’Sullivan and Ying Hong Jiang present “Determining the Efficacy of the California Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA).” The authors discuss the results of their research on teacher candidates taking the RICA.

“Lessons Learned from the ‘It Takes a Valley’ Program: Recruiting and Retaining Future Teachers to Serve in High-Needs Schools” by Amy Strage, Susan Meyers, and Janet Norris focuses their research on a project aimed at recruiting and retaining teachers in the Silicon Valley.

This Summer 2002 issue concludes with an interview with Glasser, the renowned psychiatrist who has, throughout his career, bridged the chasm between the field of psychology and the education of students in schools.

I hope you will find this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* timely and intellectually challenging. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or suggestions.

Themes for upcoming issues will include, among others, Arts-Based Approaches in Teacher Education Research, Teacher Education for Social Justice, Critical Pedagogy in Teacher Education, Building Classroom Communities, An Historical Examination of Innovations in Teacher Education, and Passionate Teaching and Learning in an Era of Standardization.

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—**Thomas Nelson**
Editor